

WALLINGFORD, PA—On April 17, 2009, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) joined Rachel Altschuler-Bruenjes, a Strath Haven High School graduate and a member of the Navy Reserves who served in Afghanistan, who returned to her alma mater to raise a flag that was flown over Camp Phoenix in Afghanistan.

Rachel decided she needed to serve her country following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Prior to enlisting in the Navy, Rachel graduated from Smith College with a degree in Math and Fine Arts and completed an MBA from the University of Washington. It was while stationed at Camp Phoenix in Kabul, Afghanistan, that Rachel and her colleagues decided to support Quabel Baji, a desperately poor school serving students in grades kindergarten through 12. In the spring of 2007, students from Strath Haven High School collected a large amount of school supplies to send to Afghanistan for Operation Not Forgotten, a program run by Navy volunteers. VFW Post #3460 then mailed the packages to Rachel at Camp Phoenix, and they were able to provide school supplies, toys, and clothing to the children and teachers of Quabel Baji.

“We are here to celebrate the absolute best of the United States of America,” said Congressman Sestak. “At this moment we gather to recognize the power of our great nation as reflected in some very good people. Those who have supported Operation Not Forgotten include young and not so young; liberal, moderate, and conservative; educators and students; Veterans, active duty, and reservists; men and women; believers of many faiths; and members of diverse ethnic groups. All bound by a single purpose—to show the children of Afghanistan and the people of the world what it truly means to be an American.”

The Congressman acknowledged Rachel for her service and congratulated her on the birth of her son, 9-month old Fyn who was by her side. He also acknowledged Rachel’s mother, Susan Altschuler, who introduced him to Operation Not Forgotten in February 2007, and her father, Martin; Strath Haven Principal MaryJo Yanaconne and Wallingford-Swarthmore Superintendent Dr. Rudolph Rubeis; Pam Gruenlian, of the Springfield H.S. Community Service/Leo Club; the students and staff of Strath Haven, Scenic Hills Elementary School, and E.T. Richardson Middle School; Jane Burke of St. Anastasia School’s 6th grade, who collected 500 ‘beanie babies’ and her parents, who took on the task of shipping those beanie babies; Commander Rocco Polidoro of American Legion Post 227; Adjutant Jake Knapp of VFW Post 3460; Gail D’Urso of the SHHS Interact Club and her wonderful students; Captain Joshua S. Edwards, Color Guard Sgt. Ackryod, and Sgt. McCann, USMC, Bravo Co., 6th ESB, Folsom.

“By reaching out to her Mom, Rachel sparked a movement that gave me a very good

opportunity early in my tenure as a Congressman to recognize how great the 7th Congressional District and our Nation can be when we are fighting a just cause—together—as one,” the Congressman continued. “Operation Not Forgotten is offering young Afghanis the opportunity to see light rather than the darkness of hate and ignorance. The power of school supplies and the occasional ‘beanie baby’ represent the ultimate ‘force multipliers’ for our troops in Afghanistan. As I have said many times, it is the power of our ideals that matter most. The combination of our brave men and women in uniform supported by their families and friends at home is a remarkable force for good.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of “Deep Blue,” the Navy’s anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the “Global War on Terrorism.” He served as President Clinton’s Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

###